

Disposal (Rendering) of Deceased Animals from Los Angeles County Animal Shelters

The disposal of deceased animals from County shelters is an emotional and often misunderstood process. This information is provided to answer the majority of questions regarding the disposal of shelter animals.

What happens to the bodies of the animals that are euthanized at County shelters? Deceased animals are picked up by D&D Disposal, also known as West Coast Rendering, located in Vernon, Calif. The remains are rendered into animal by-products. D&D processes hundreds of tons of animal carcasses, tissues and by-products that would otherwise end up in landfills.

What is involved in the rendering process? Rendering is a means of recycling animal remains. The remains are placed in large vats and heated to a high temperature in excess of 265 degrees Fahrenheit, at which point they become sterile and free of pathogens. Then a series of mechanical process occur that separate the fat, liquid, and proteins into separate collection systems.

The majority of rendered materials are remains of cattle, hogs, poultry, and sheep – the parts that cannot be sold for meat, leather, or other products. Other animal remains, such as butcher scraps, restaurant grease, fish, zoo animals, marine life, and animals from shelters are rendered as well.

What happens to the animal remains – how are they used? The end results of the rendering process are tallow/grease and protein solids. Depending on the grade of rendered product and the markets the business sells to, the remains can be found in lubricants, polish, soap, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, gelatin, fertilizers, pet foods (from rendered livestock – NOT DOGS AND CATS), and agricultural feed.

The remains of animals rendered by D&D are made into a protein-rich product called “tankage” and are shipped to Asia where tankage is used as part of the local aquaculture. The tankage is used to feed shrimp, which in turn are fed to eels. Sometimes the tankage is used in hog and chicken feed.

How prevalent is animal rendering? Animal rendering has been practiced for over a hundred years as a means of salvaging protein and fat content from otherwise waste material. According to the 1997 US Census, there are 239 rendering establishments in the United States with 21 facilities in California. However very few are able, due to volume or food-quality constraints, to accept animals from animal shelters. D&D is the only establishment in southern California that provides this service. All animal shelters in southern California use D&D for the disposal of their animals.

Are rendered pets from the County used as ingredients in pet food? NO.

D&D assures us that pet remains are not used as pet food ingredients. In addition, a 2002 study by the Food and Drug Administration's Center for Veterinary Medicine (FDA/CVM) developed a test to detect dog and cat DNA in dog food. The results, "demonstrated a complete absence of material that would have been derived from euthanized dogs or cats".

Does the Department receive money from the rendering company? No. The County pays D&D for the removal of dead animals from its shelters.

Is the euthanasia agent, sodium pentobarbital, found in pet food? Sodium pentobarbital (pentobarbital) is not completely degraded during the rendering process, and minute portions may be found in pet food. However, the FDA/CVM's 2002 study stated, "the pentobarbital residues are entering pet foods from euthanized, rendered cattle or even horses."

Additionally, the levels of pentobarbital residue were found to be so low that the CVM concluded that "it is highly unlikely a dog consuming dry dog food will experience any adverse affects from exposures to the low levels of pentobarbital."

How is D&D regulated? D&D operates under licenses and permits issued by several different governmental and regulatory agencies. The California Department of Food & Agriculture, Meat & Poultry Inspection (MPI) Branch has direct oversight of the rendering industry in California. This agency may be contacted at: 1220 "N" Street, Room A-125, Sacramento CA 95814 or by telephone at (916) 654-0504. D&D is also inspected by the County Department of Health Services and also has permits from the Federal Food and Drug Administration, but the MPI is the main agency responsible for overseeing and inspecting D&D operations, and all inquiries about D&D's rendering operations should be directed to that agency.

How many animals does the County send D&D? Last year the County sent approximately 80,000 animals to D&D. However, these were not all euthanized dogs and cats. Of this number, 21,583 were dead animals removed from streets or animal bodies surrendered by their owners after their pets passed away. Furthermore, 7,294 were pets that were euthanized at the request of their owners, usually for medical and humane reasons. Additionally, 9,264 were animals other than dogs and cats, such as livestock, wildlife, birds, rabbits, etc. The remaining 42,486 were dogs and cats euthanized at our six County shelters.

What alternatives to the rendering process are available for animal disposal? Right now, there are none. It is less safe to bury euthanized animals in landfills because the sodium pentobarbital is still present in their bodies. Scavenging animals may ingest the pentobarbital and become ill or die (recently, a number of bald eagles were found to have died from this source in the U.S.).

Also, it is unclear whether landfills would accept deceased animals because they may not be able to handle the volume.

Cremation would require a very large scale, full-time operation to be able to process the volume of animals and would be much more expensive. There are also concerns whether the EPA would permit such an operation in this area due to present concerns about air quality. Finally, the image of crematoriums also generates emotional reactions and may not be more aesthetically.

Other Information: According to the FDA, prior to the appearance of BSE (mad cow disease), there was no evidence of human or animal disease associated with the feeding of properly rendered and handled animal feed ingredients despite the use of tissues from diseased animals or animals that have died otherwise than by slaughter.

Further, the Department of Animal Care and Control would not consider any other means of euthanasia other than sodium pentobarbital. It is universally regarded as the most humane and painless method of euthanasia.